



## Coast Guard Flag Voice 23

### MANAGING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

When we speak about workforce diversity, often the differences of race and gender come to mind. In reality, the Coast Guard is a significantly "diverse" organization made up of vastly different specialties (enlisted ratings, officer career paths, civilian occupational series) and substantially different workforce "groups" (enlisted, officer, civilian, active duty military, reserve military, Auxiliary, contractor). In fact, most of our workplace conflicts are based on these latter differences rather than race and gender. Too often one or more individuals from one group look at another group and declare the other is getting a "better deal" or some sort of "advantage."

Each of the aforementioned groups is DIFFERENT. But different doesn't or shouldn't mean one is "better" than another. Our strength as an organization is built on these differences, coming together for a common purpose. The adage "the sum is greater than its parts" applies.

Each group has both "advantages" and "disadvantages" in every measurable facet depending on where you "sit." For instance, civilian employees may see limited career promotion potential in the Coast Guard as a decided disadvantage compared to the military. On the other hand, our military members may see our civilian employees as having the advantage of a stable family life without deployments or frequent change of duty locations.

What I stress is these and many other differences are neither good nor bad, but just different - each with its own strengths that add to our organization's effectiveness.

Does this mean we should just learn to live with all these differences? Not at all. As an organization that actively manages diversity, we should constantly promote greater opportunity for all and eliminate artificial barriers within the workforce. For instance, how can we create more promotion opportunities for our civilian employees? One of the Workforce Cultural Audit (WCA) action items is to create more career ladder positions throughout the Service. However, if you supervise civilians, I suggest you don't wait for a "service-wide" solution from HQs. As a supervisor, you have a responsibility to create opportunities within your part of the Coast Guard and ensure each of your people has an Individual Development Plan (IDP). See "A Supervisor's Guide to Career Development and Counseling for Civilian Employees." The IDP would identify training, educational, and job development assignments with the goal of making the employee better qualified for the opportunities that arise inside and outside the Coast Guard.

What about artificial barriers? You also can work to identify and eliminate artificial barriers that do little to enhance the performance of the Service and its members. A good example may be found among the

policies applying to regular and reserve officers on active duty. Regular officers are primarily commissioned through the Academy; reserve officers are typically OCS graduates with no prior service and direct commissioned officers. The differences are set in law (Title 10) and the Service uses these differences to assist in managing the workforce, especially at the junior level. Should the officer workforce need to expand or contract rapidly, the law allows us to use reserve commissions. However, that capability should not justify our erecting barriers to opportunities for our members. Therefore, as we further attempt to "level the playing field," two policy changes were recently approved. ALDIST 316/98 announced reserve officers now may compete for advanced education and training programs before becoming eligible for integration, in other words, on the same basis as regular officers. In addition, ALDIST 315/98 streamlined the entire integration process by eliminating a low value-added panel perceived as an artificial hurdle in the path of officers attempting to make the Coast Guard a career.

These are just examples. Each of us needs to challenge our current thinking about differences and develop better ways of ensuring all our people are valued for their differences, acknowledged for their achievements, and rewarded for their accomplishments. This is leadership - the umbrella under which we link our core values (e.g. RESPECT each other), quality management (striving for continual improvement in our processes through effective teamwork), and diversity management (creating a positive environment, valuing all our people, and providing them the opportunity to reach their full potential).

The Diversity Advisory Council (DAC) represents the extensive diversity of Team CG (military active duty and reserve, civilian, Auxiliary, age, gender, ethnic, physical disability, etc.). It provides recommendations to the Commandant on a broad range of issues designed to reduce artificial barriers in the workforce. These issues transcend the traditional definition of diversity - race and gender. Team Coast Guard members who identify artificial barriers are encouraged to bring their concerns to the attention of Diversity Advisory Council members. At the last meeting, the Council recommended several improvements on many issues, such as better inclusion of civilians, accessibility for people with disabilities, more flexibility in parenting and family care, and educational opportunities.

ALDIST 313/98 announced a Coast Guard Diversity Summit that will enable us to continue dialog on the very broad range of diversity issues - dialog critical for an organization that truly promotes the value of all members. I look forward to discussing these and related issues.

Regards, FL Ames

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